

FIG. 1 PRIOR ART

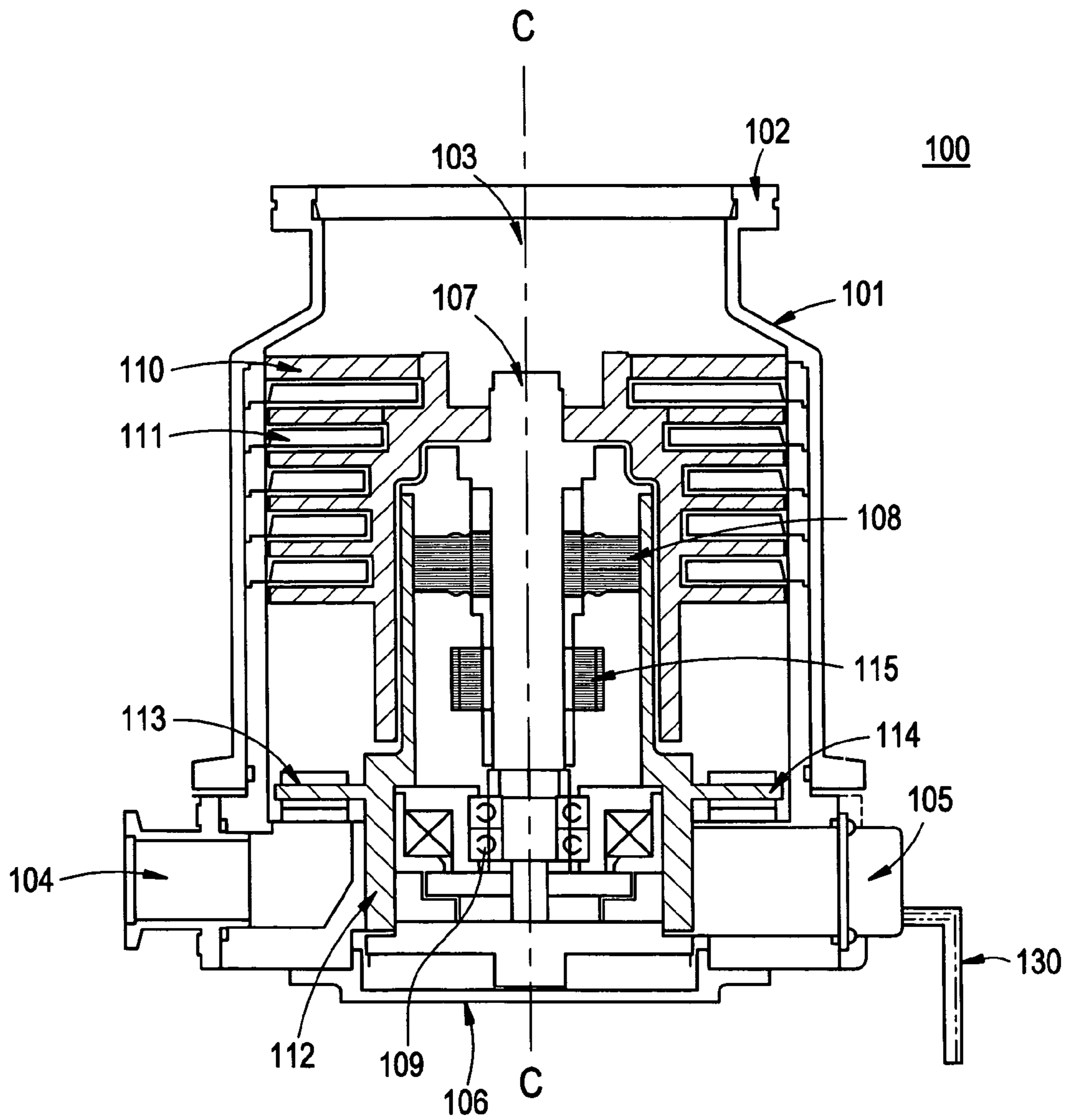


FIG. 2 PRIOR ART

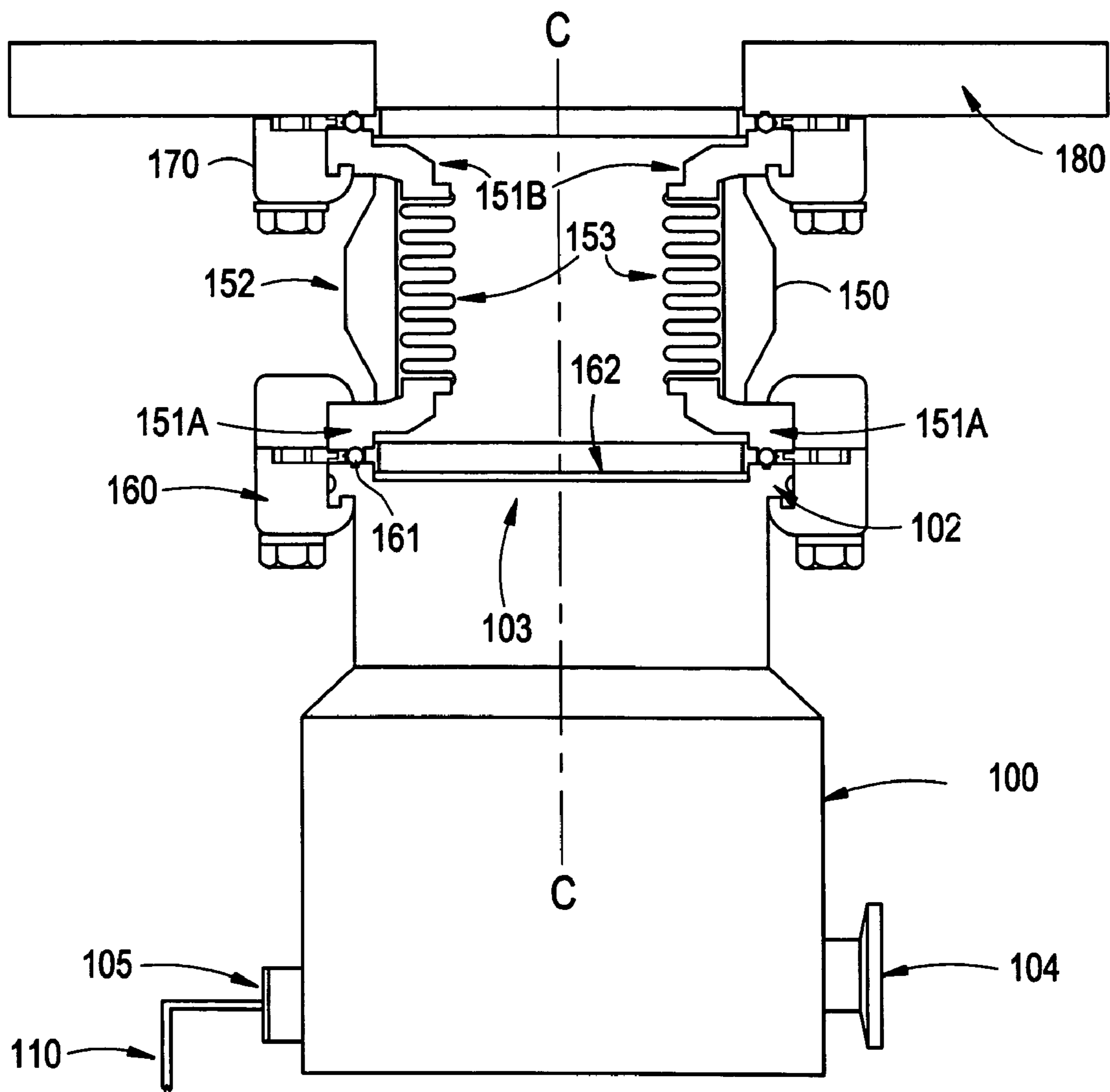


FIG. 3

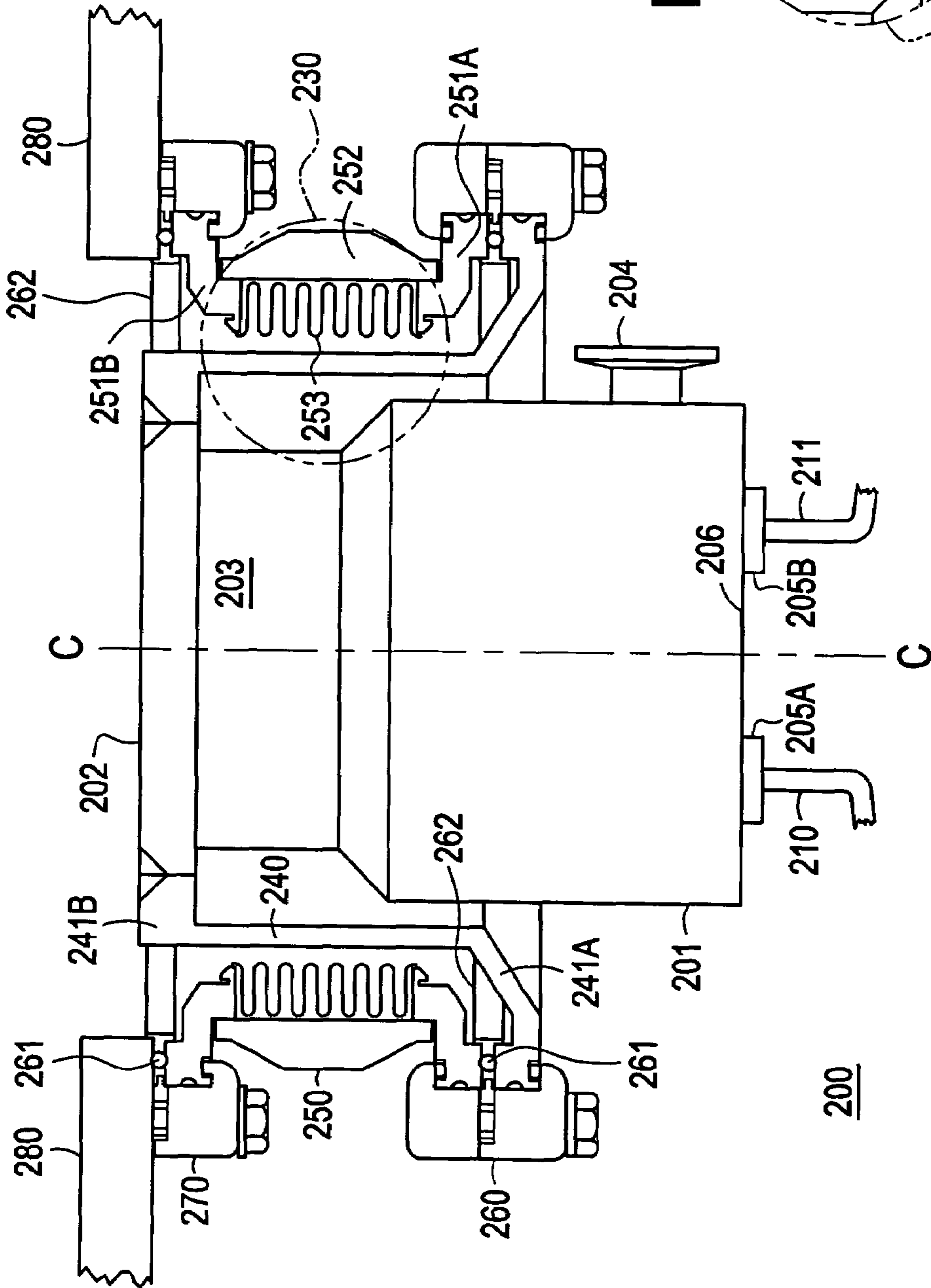


FIG. 7A

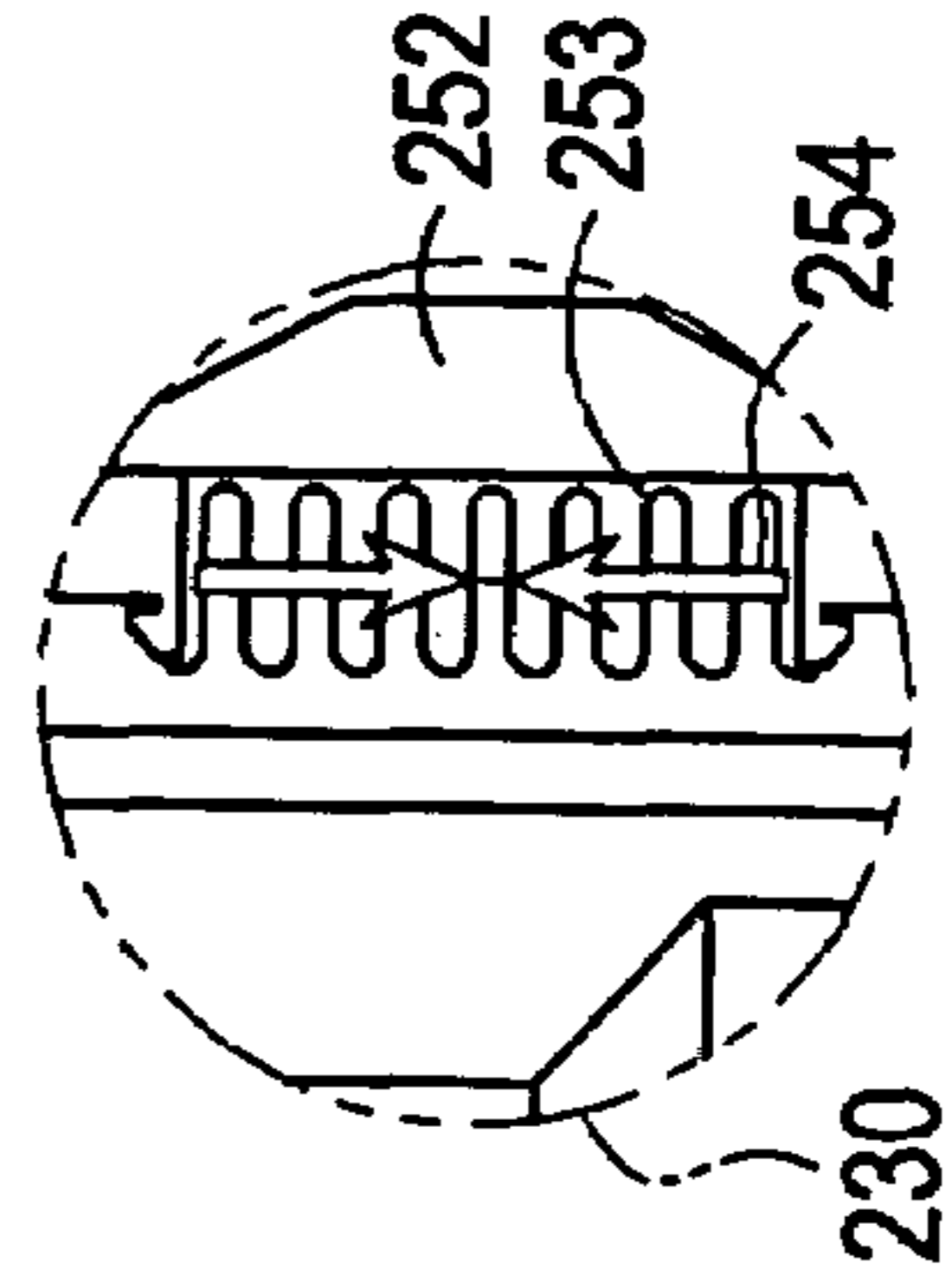


FIG. 4

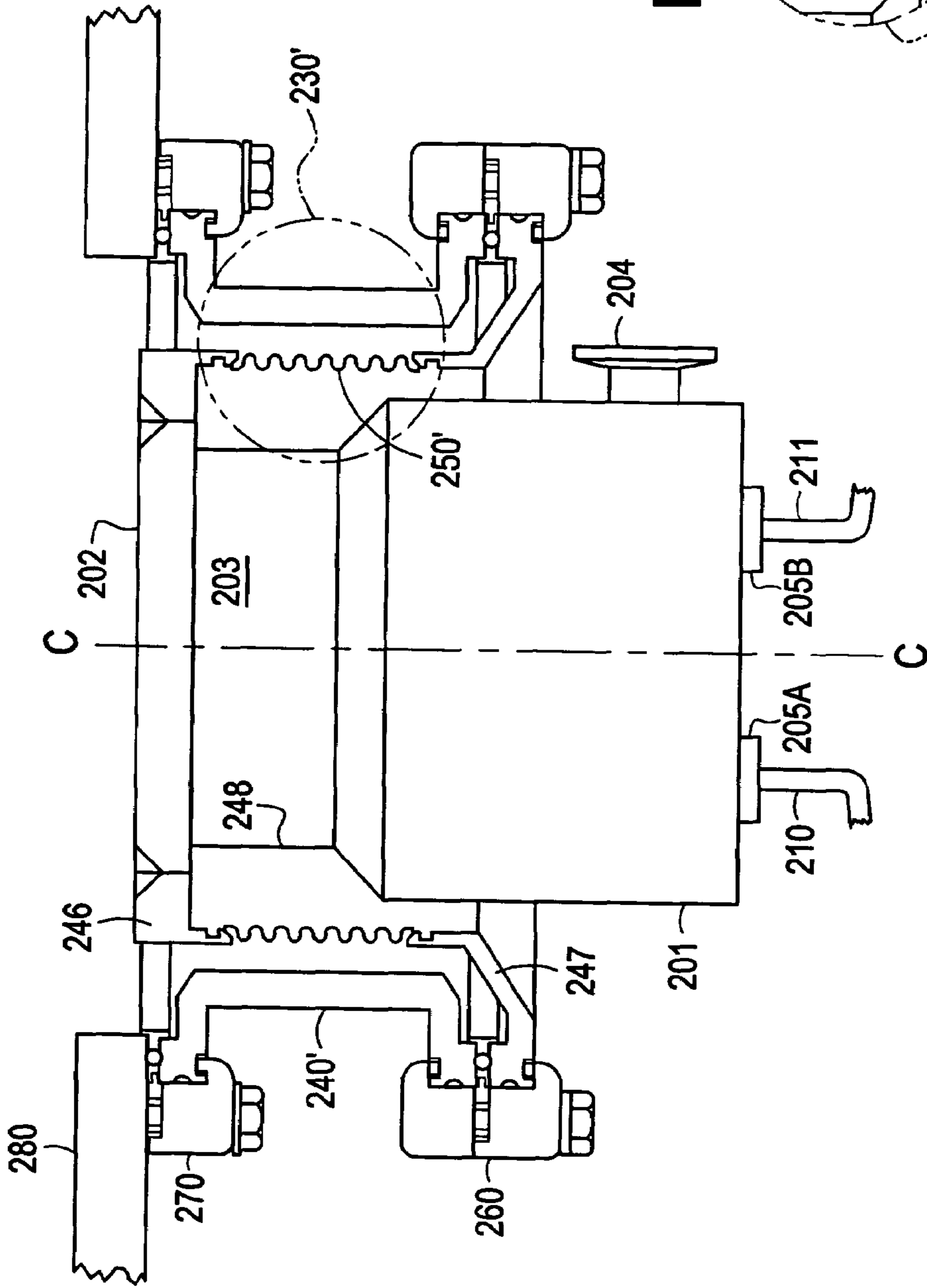


FIG. 7B

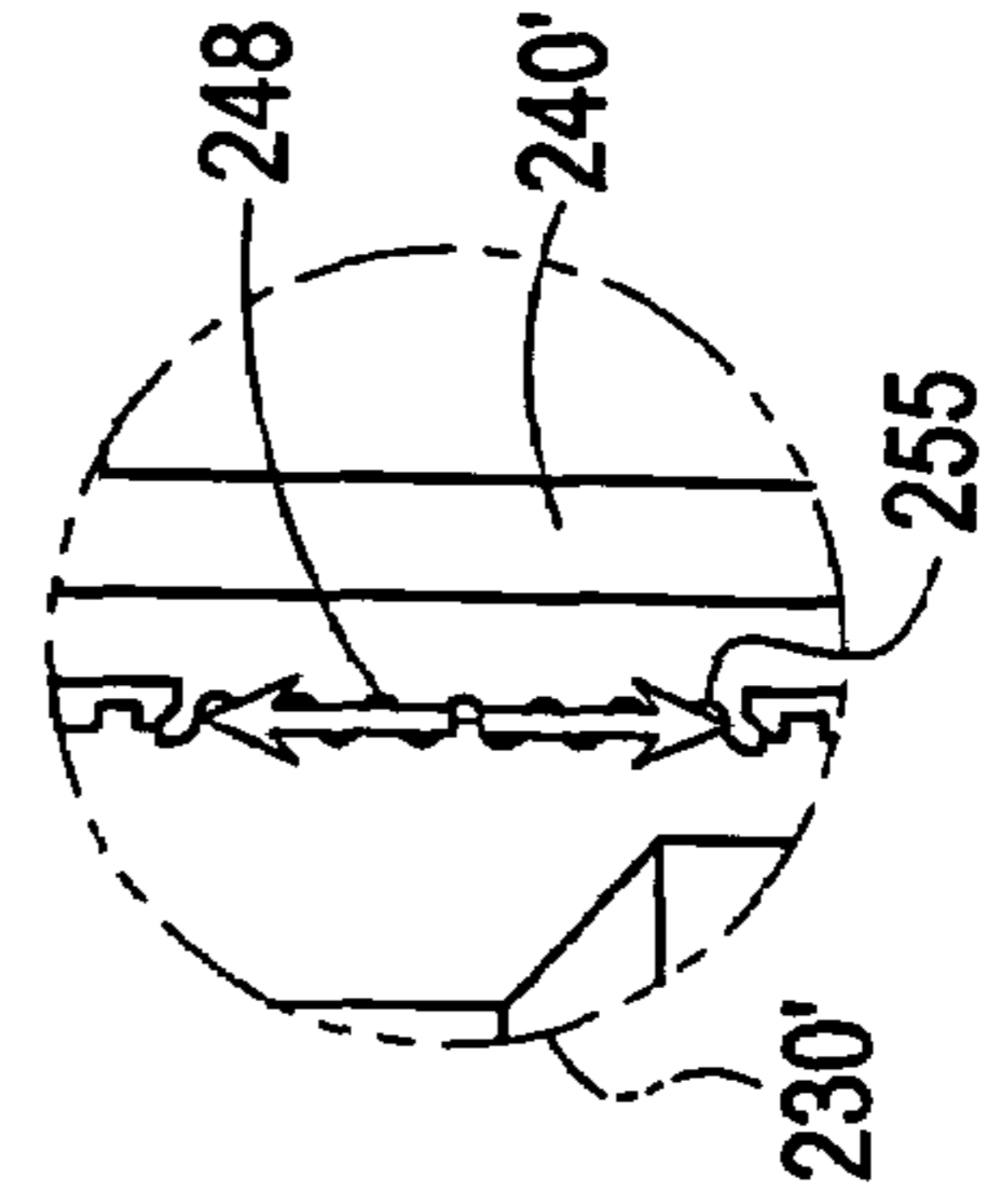


FIG. 5

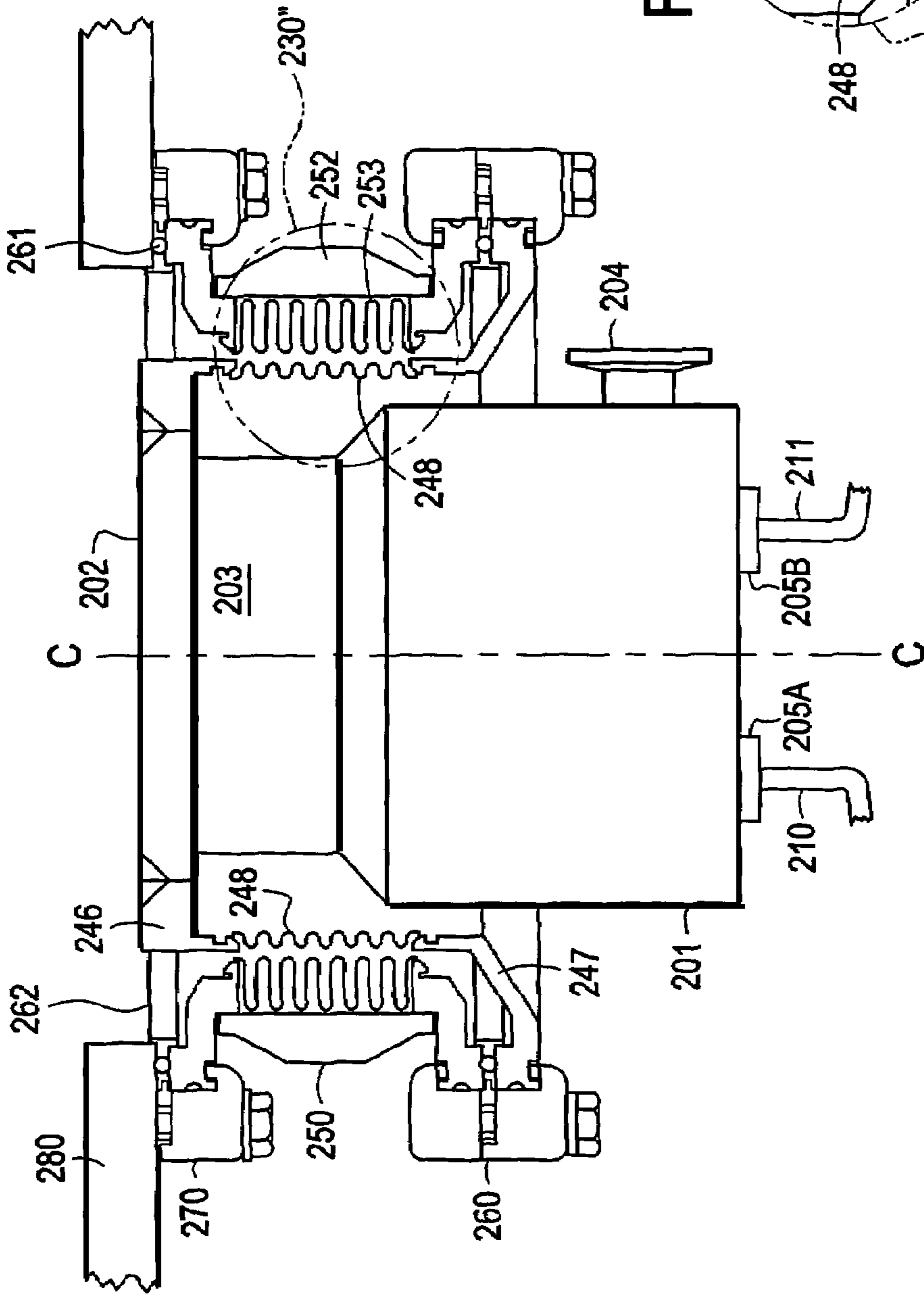


FIG. 7C

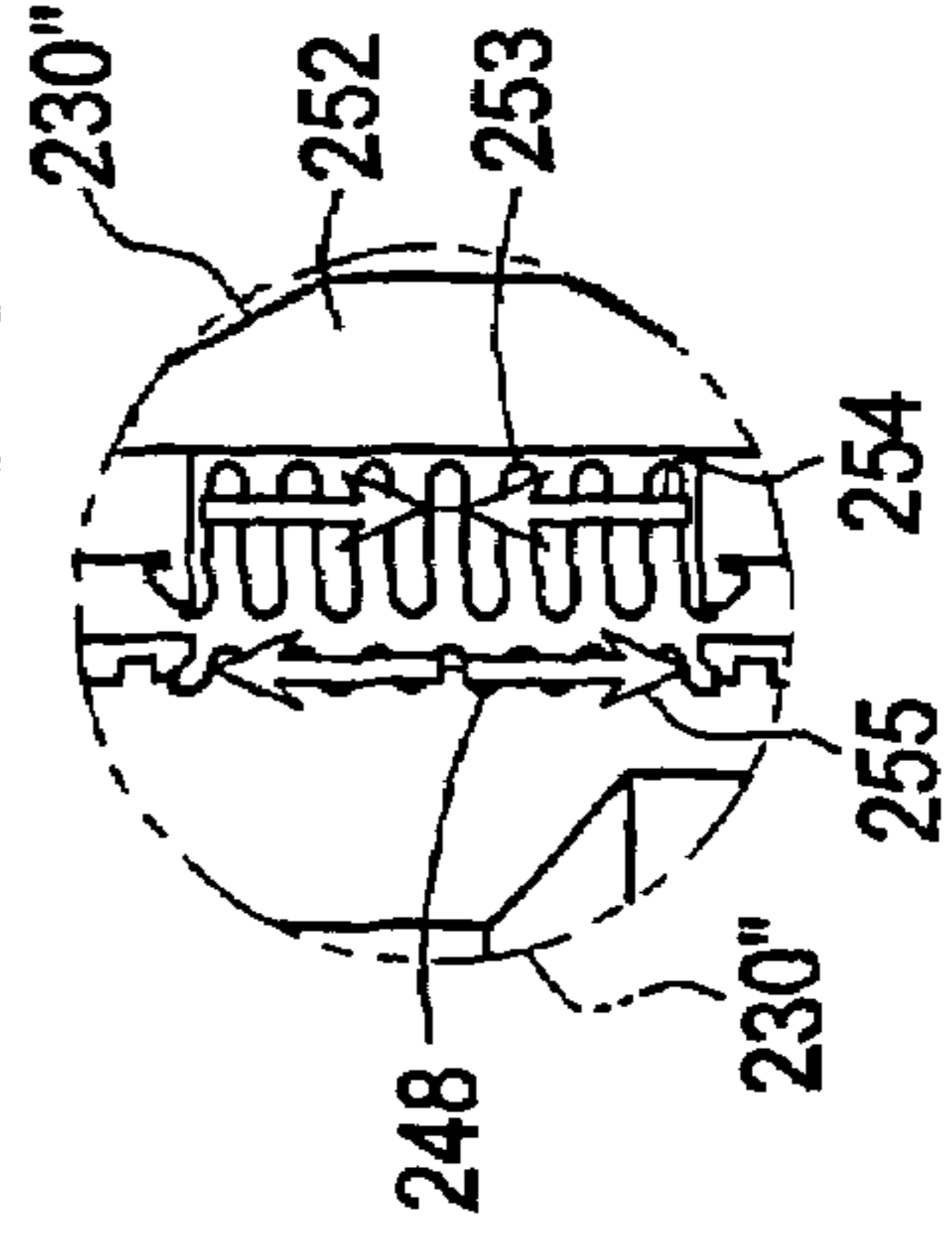
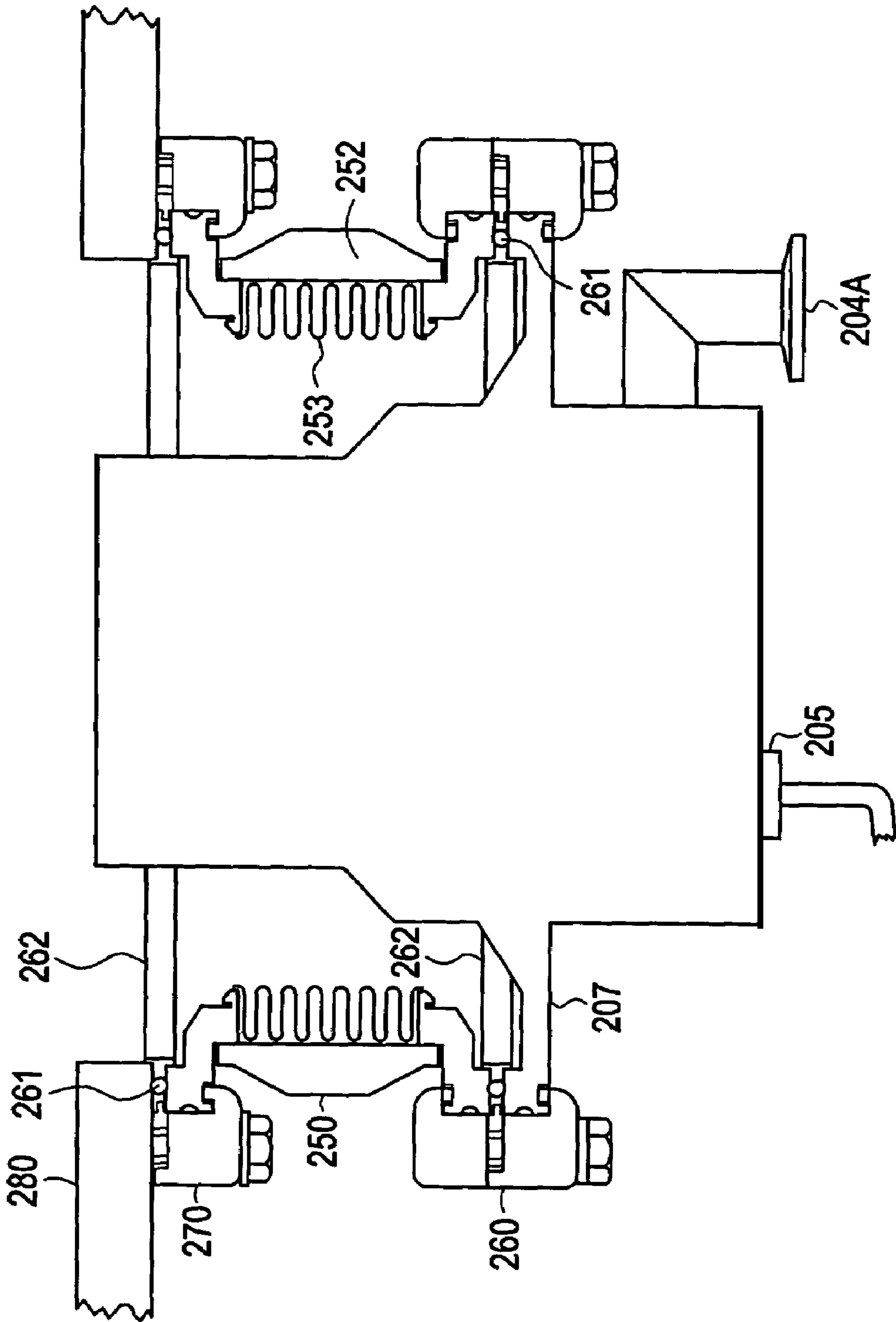


FIG. 6



VIBRATION DAMPER WITH NESTED TURBO MOLECULAR PUMP

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention concerns vacuum pumps and, in particular, turbo molecular pumps that are used in semiconductor manufacturing processes requiring a vacuum environment with a pressure lower than atmospheric pressure. More specifically, the present invention concerns the use of vibration dampers between the vacuum pump and a vacuum environment, such as a vacuum chamber, in order to isolate the vacuum environment from any vibration generated by the pump.

In semiconductor manufacturing processes, a variety of steps, from layer or film deposition to inspection, are performed in a vacuum environment. However, because the vacuum pump is constructed with extremely tight tolerances extending down to the millimeter range, which enables operation with free molecular flow, the pump can be the source of a significant problem with vibration. This problem is particularly acute with turbo molecular pumps, having a floated rotor and stator construction, where rotational speeds are attained in the range of 50,000 rpm or greater.

The achievement of proper vibration isolation between the pump and the vacuum chamber is particularly important where the semiconductor structure is in the submicron range. The unwanted effects of vibration include errors in line deposition and film formation, and even errors in the inspection and quality assurance process, where extremely high accuracy in comparing patterns on a manufactured substrate against a reference pattern is required, and vibration anomalies may lead to erroneous decisions on product quality.

Such problems arise in inspection systems using scanning electron microscopes (SEM) or comparably sensitive devices, having less than one micron field of view, where inspection of a specimen (typically a wafer) is performed with the generation of an electron beam applied in a specimen chamber that must be maintained in a low pressure and contamination-free environment.

An example of a conventional turbo-molecular pump of the type manufactured by Varian Corp. or Pfeiffer Edwards is illustrated in FIG. 1, where the pump **100** has a cylindrical outer body **101**. As illustrated in the figure, the pump has a central axis C-C and an inlet port **103** defined by a rim **102** that is adapted to attach directly, or be coupled via a conduit or manifold, to a vacuum chamber (not shown). At an opposite axial end of the cylinder body **101** is an exhaust port **104** to which the contents of the vacuum chamber are exhausted. The pump exhaust port is radially disposed with regard to the central axis C-C and is located on one side of the pump body **101**. Preferably, a conduit **105** for electrical, hydraulic, gas purge and cooling hose connections (collectively **130**) is also radially disposed. At the same axial end, the bottom of the pump body has a sealing plate **106** that is removable but also serves as a support. The interior of the body **101** defines a chamber containing a rotor **107** that is disposed for rotation along the axis C-C and is supported by magnetic bearings **108** and mechanical bearings **109**. The rotor **107** drives rotating blades **110**, which are disposed radially with respect to the central axis C-C. Stator blades **111**, also disposed radially and interposed between the rotator blades **110**, are affixed to a support adjacent to the inner surface of the body **101**, in a manner well known in the art. The rotor **107** is supported by a frame **112**, and is mounted to the body **101** by vibration damping connectors

113 via arms **114** on the rotor body **112**. A motor **115** is operative to drive the rotor **107** at high speed, in the range of approximately 50,000 rpm or higher.

A coupling of the molecular-turbo pump **100** to a vacuum chamber is conventionally implemented with the use of a vibration damper **150**, as illustrated in FIG. 2. Elements in FIG. 2 having a reference numeral identical to those in FIG. 1 refer to the same structure and are not further described. The vibration damping mechanism **150** is coupled at one end to the rim **102** of the pump **100** at input **103** via a lower clamp **160** and is coupled at the other end to the inlet port **180** via an upper clamp **170**. The clamp **160** fits around the rim **102** and a lower distal end **151A** of the vibration damping structure **150** and is secured by a plurality of bolts (unnumbered). At the opposite distal end **151B** of the vibration damping structure, clamp **170** serves to couple the vibration damper **150** to the structure of the vacuum chamber inlet port **180** and is similarly secured by a plurality of bolts (unnumbered). The coupling of the turbo molecular vacuum pump **100** to the inlet port **180** via the vibration damper **150** defines a "serial-coupled" damper and vacuum pump arrangement. One or more centering rings **162** (which are conventional and available off the shelf, for example, at www.duniway.com) may be secured by the clamps **160**, **170** and sealed by an O-ring **161**, as is known in the art.

The vacuum damper **150** comprises a rubberized support **152** that extends between the connector portions **151A** and **151B** at the opposite distal ends of the damper. The structure is made of a hardened rubber and has coupled to its interior surface a plurality of baffles **153**. The vacuum damper **150** is a conventional design that is available off-the-shelf from several vendors.

Although the serial type arrangement illustrated in FIG. 2 eliminates some of the vibration that originates in the pump **100**, there continues to remain a problem with residual vibration. As illustrated by U.S. patent Pub. 2001/0012488 to Ohtachi et al, entitled VACUUM PUMP, particularly in FIG. 4 of the Ohtachi et al publication, a series type connection may be used in which a damper is interposed between an input port of an external container and an outer cylindrical portion of a vacuum pump in order to prevent pump-origin vibration from being propagated to the external container. The damper uses a thin SUS-made cylindrical member bent into a bellow shape, which is coated with a silicon rubber or the like. The damper has a natural frequency of 20 Hz or less. However, the damper requires extra space in the axial direction of about 10 cm, thereby increasing the size, complexity of the structure, and cost of construction, assembly and maintenance. In order to resolve this problem, the Ohtachi et al patent depresses the propagation of vibrations to an external container without the use of a damper, by applying a vibration-absorbing member between a stator portion and a base. Nonetheless, as illustrated in FIG. 5 of the Ohtachi et al publication, a bellows and extended flange continues to be required. The disadvantage of such a system is that vacuum power is significantly decreased. The additional distance between the pump input port and the input port of the vacuum chamber, as well as the bellows structure itself, reduces the effective speed of the pump. Thus, for a given pumping requirement, a much larger and more expensive pump is required.

The present invention is intended to solve this problem by allowing a direct connection between the pump and a vacuum chamber inlet port, thereby increasing conductance with accompanying reduction in resistance, while providing vibration damping with a damper assembled in a nested

fashion about the pump. The nested arrangement may be considered a parallel, rather than serial connection of the damper structure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a gas turbo pump assembly for connection to an inlet port of a vacuum chamber, which defines a rigid mounting structure, the assembly having high throughput with low vibration. The assembly comprises a turbo pump having a pump body with an external surface and a center axis defining a direction of gas flow from a first axial end toward a second axial end of said body. The pump also has a pump inlet port, the inlet port being coupled to the vacuum chamber port disposed at the first axial end of the body, and an exit port disposed proximate the second axial end of the body. The assembly further has a vibration damper, structured to enclose a major portion of the pump body in a nested arrangement.

In a further feature of the invention, the vibration damper has at least one flexible structure, preferably a bellow damper, that connects between the body of the pump and the rigid mounting structure and encloses a major portion of the body of the pump.

The invention further involves a method of reducing the effect of vibration in a gas turbo pump assembly for connection to an inlet port of a vacuum chamber, which defines a rigid mounting structure, so that the assembly has high throughput with low vibration. The method comprises the step of providing a mounting structure on said turbo pump at a first axial end; and a step of connecting a vibration damping assembly to said rigid mounting structure at one end thereof and to the turbo pump at another end thereof in order to enclose a major portion of the turbo pump in a nested arrangement.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of a prior art turbo molecular vacuum pump.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of a prior art serial-coupled connection of a turbo molecular vacuum pump to a vacuum chamber inlet portion via a vibration damping mechanism.

FIG. 3 is an illustration of a nested or parallel arrangement of a vibration damper and a turbo molecular vacuum pump, in accordance with a first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is an illustration of a nested or parallel arrangement of a vibration damper and a turbo molecular vacuum pump, in accordance with a second exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is an illustration of a nested or parallel arrangement of a vibration damper and a turbo molecular vacuum pump, in accordance with a third embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is an illustration of a nested or parallel arrangement of a vibration damper and a turbo molecular vacuum pump, in accordance with a sixth embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 7A-7C illustrate details of certain forces that are operative to provide damping in the embodiments of FIGS. 3-5, respectively.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

While the present invention is described in accordance with certain exemplary embodiments, it is not limited

thereto. Numerous alternative structures and corresponding embodiments would be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art based upon the particular embodiments disclosed herein. When presenting the different embodiments, like structures are given the same reference number for consistency. The embodiments presented are only exemplary and the present invention is defined by the appended claims.

With reference to FIG. 3, an illustration is provided of a first exemplary embodiment of an arrangement of a vibration-damped turbo molecular vacuum pump nested within a vibration damper, forming a gas turbo pump assembly **200**. The gas turbo pump assembly **200** according to the present invention may have a turbo pump **201** with substantially the same arrangement of rotor, stator and motor as that illustrated in FIG. 1, including a cylindrical outer body having a central axis C-C, but may differ with regard to the arrangements of conduits and passages and outer body structures, due to features of the invention, as subsequently explained. Disposed at one axial end of the cylindrical body of the pump **201** is a pump rim **202** that defines the end of an input port **203** and from which the pump **201** is suspended. At the opposite axial end of the body of the pump **201**, and disposed in a radial orientation, is an exhaust port **204**, which is arranged in a manner consistent with the conventional pump in FIG. 1. However, the bottom end **206** of the pump **201** may have one or more access ports **205A**, **205B** for providing electrical connections **210** or purge and cooling connections **211** to components disposed in the interior of the body of the pump **201**. The purge and cooling connections, which may include a rough pumping port, cooling water inlet and outlet, and bearings gas purge, when provided at the bottom end, allow convenient access for connection and maintenance. While the components, including rotor and stator portions may be similar to those illustrated in FIG. 1, the connection at the bottom wall **206** of the pump **201** provides significant advantages for access related to assembly, servicing and repair. Further, the positioning of the access ports **205A** and **205B** frees the side portion of the cylindrical body of the pump **201** for coverage by the vibration damping assembly **230**, which in the illustrated exemplary embodiment comprises a vibration damping structure **250** and a rigid support member **240**.

In particular, the vibration damping structure **250**, which has a bottom end support portion **251A** and top end support portion **251B**, is constructed in the same manner as in the damper structure **150**. In this regard, the vibration damping structure **250** also includes bellow **253** and rubberized support **252**. The vibration damping structure **250** is secured to the rigid input port structure **280** by clamp **270** and bolts (unnumbered), which are similar to the clamp **170** in FIG. 2. In addition, the opposite end of the vibration damping structure **250** is secured by a clamp **260** and bolts (unnumbered) to a rigid support member **240** that extends from a lower end of the vibration damping structure **250** toward the pump rim **202** for connection. In an exemplary embodiment, the combination of the vibration damping structure **250** and the support member **240** define a vibration damping assembly **230** having a substantially cone shape and being formed around the outside of the pump body in order to effectively suppress vibration. The clamp **260** is designed to affix the bottom end support portion **251A** to the lower portion **241A** of the rigid support member **240**. A plurality of such clamps **260** are provided at plural circumferential positions of the vibration damping assembly **230**. The upper portion **241B** of the rigid support member **240** is secured to the rim **202** of the turbo vacuum pump **201** by welding, or the like, and the lower portion **241A** of the support member **240** is secured to

the lower part **251A** by the clamp **260**. With this arrangement, the pump **201** is flexibly affixed at its rim **202**, via the substantially cone-shaped vibration damping assembly **230** to the input port structure **280**, i.e., via the support portion **240** and damper **250**. One or more centering rings **262** may be secured by the clamps **260**, **270** and sealed by an O-ring **261**, in order to ensure proper alignment of the pump with the rigid input port structure **280**.

In operation, with the support member **240** being a rigid part and the flexible bellow damper **250** being a flexible part, and both being disposed in a substantially overlapping cone-shaped arrangement with a common connection at their bottom portions **241A** and **251A**, respectively, an effective damping arrangement can be obtained. In particular, with this structure, the damper will be compressed by the atmospheric pressure and will expand in response to vibration forces, thereby providing the desired damping effect. FIG. 7A illustrates the compression forces **254** that apply to the damper structure in this embodiment.

With this arrangement, the vibration damper **250** may be structured to surround the majority of the exterior surface of the body of the turbo pump **201**, thereby providing an extensive vibration absorbing structure with the pump nested within the cavity of the vibration absorbing structure.

With the transfer of the utility access ports **205A**, **205B** to the bottom plate **206** of the vacuum pump **201**, there is no obstruction to the vibration damper **250** covering a full two-thirds of the axial length of the turbo pump body. Optimally, the vibration damper will cover a significant portion, e.g., 50-90%, of the outer surface of the vacuum pump, however, it must be recognized that movement or other adjustment of the exit port or damper would be needed to achieve the upper range of coverage.

Significantly, the vibration damping structure may be an off-the-shelf structure that is simply larger than one used in the serial connection in FIG. 2. For example, an ISO 160 size damper may be used instead of an ISO 100 size damper, which would be appropriate for damping in FIG. 2. However, because of the direct connection between the inlet port of the pump **203** and the inlet port of the vacuum chamber **280**, a smaller size pump would be required. In particular, rather than a 500 liter per second pump in a conventional design that is needed to obtain 300 liters per second effective pumping at the vacuum chamber inlet port, a 300 liter per second pump may be used. The difference is significant in both the size and cost of the pump, as the cost for a pump to supply a particular application may be reduced in half.

FIG. 4 shows a modification of a gas turbo pump assembly **200** of FIG. 3, particularly with respect to the vibration damper structure. Specifically, the embodiment of the gas turbo pump assembly in FIG. 4 uses a vibration damping assembly **230'**, which in the illustrated exemplary embodiment comprises a vibration damping structure **250'** and a rigid support member **240'** that are joined at their lower ends and define a generally cone shape. However, the solid support **240** that was adjacent the body of pump **201** in FIG. 3 has been replaced by an integrated support structure **250'**, comprising a combination of flexible bellows **248** and solid mounting top support **246** and bottom support **247**. The top support **246** is attached to the top of the bellows **248** and is secured to the pump rim **202** in the same manner as the top **241B** of the support **241** in FIG. 3. The bottom support **247** is attached to the bottom of the flexible bellows **248** and is secured to the bottom of a rigid support portion **240'** in the same manner as the bottom **241A** of the support **241** in FIG. 3.

A detail of the vibration damping assembly **230'** in FIG. 4 is illustrated in FIG. 7B. With the vibration damping structure **250'** disposed closest to the pump and the solid part **240'** disposed outside of the vibration damping structure **250'**, and the top **246** of the damping structure **250'** affixed by welding or the like to the rim **202** of the pump and the top of the solid part **240'** affixed to the rigid port structure **280**, the damping structure **250'** will be extracted by the atmospheric pressure according to forces **255**. This is an opposite reaction to the case in FIG. 3, where the damping structure will be compressed.

FIG. 5 shows yet another exemplary embodiment of a gas turbo pump assembly with yet another vibration damping arrangement. The embodiment of FIG. 5 uses a vibration damping assembly **230''**, which in the illustrated exemplary embodiment comprises a first vibration damping structure **250** and a second vibration damping structure **250'** that are joined at their lower ends and define a substantially cone shape. The damping structures **250** and **250'** are the same structures as disclosed with respect to FIGS. 3 and 4, respectively. The top support **246** of structure **250'** is attached to the top of the bellows **248** and is secured to the pump rim **202** in the same manner as the top **241B** of the support **241** in FIG. 3. The bottom support **247** is attached to the bottom of the bellows **248** and is secured to the bottom of the damping structure **250** in the same manner as the bottom **241A** of the support **241** in FIG. 3.

A detail of the vibration damping assembly **230''** in FIG. 5 is illustrated in FIG. 7C. With the vibration damping structure **250'** disposed closest to the pump and the vibration damping structure **250** disposed outside of the vibration damping structure **250'**, and the top **246** of the damping structure **250** affixed by welding or the like (as indicated by the conventional welding symbol) to the rim **202** of the pump and the top of the damping structure **250'** affixed to the rigid port structure **280**, the damping structure **250'** will be extracted by the atmospheric pressure and the damping structure **250** will be compressed. This permits the pump to be "floating" by the elimination of both the compression and extraction forces.

In FIG. 6, which is yet another embodiment of the invention, the body of pump **201** is girdled at a location axially away from the pump rim **202** by a radially extended and rigid support structure **207**, preferably in the form of a support ring or radially extended tab or flange portion that is integrally formed on the body by welding, molding or the like, and whose purpose is explained subsequently. In addition, the opposite end of the vibration damper **250** is secured by a clamp **260** and bolts (unnumbered) to the support portion **207** that is formed around the outside of the body of pump **201** and is rigidly affixed via the support portion **207** on the pump body (or other similar structure for attaching the damper **250** to the lower part of the body) to the rim **202** of the pump. With this structure, the pump is supported at both the top rim and mid body positions, and not just at the top rim **202**, as in the embodiments of FIGS. 3, 4 and 5.

In all cases illustrated in FIGS. 3, 4, 5 and 6, the pump will be nested substantially within the damper arrangement, and will permit a reduction in the loss of pumping speed in prior art designs, easier access to facilities connections and smaller size, thus lower cost.

The present invention comprises a combination of a vibration damper having a vacuum pump nested therein, as well as the vibration damper assembly itself, adapted to receive a conventional vacuum pump or specially adapted vacuum pump with bottom-access conduits and/or support ring structures. The vibration damper assembly **230**, **230'**

and 230", as disclosed herein, may be sold in kit form, comprising one or more of a vibration damper 250, 250', rigid support members 240, 240' and bellows 246-248, as illustrated in the figures. The bellows may be made of metal and may be either formed or welded into an appropriate shape.

While the present invention has been described in connection with several exemplary embodiments, the invention further contemplates variations thereon, including variations or alternatives in materials, mechanical couplings and supports, that would be known to those skilled in the art.

What we claimed is:

1. A gas turbo pump assembly for connection to an inlet port, comprising:

a turbo pump having a pump body with an external surface and a center axis, a pump inlet port, said pump inlet port being disposed at a first axial end of said pump body and being coupled to a vacuum chamber port, and an exit port disposed proximate a second axial end of said body; and

a vibration damping assembly, disposed to enclose a significant portion of said pump body in a nested arrangement, said vibration damping assembly comprising a first nested structure having an outer peripheral surface and an inner peripheral surface, said inner peripheral surface being disposed around and adjacent to the external surface of said significant portion of said pump body, and a second nested structure having an inner peripheral surface, said inner peripheral surface being disposed around and adjacent to the outer peripheral surface of said first nested structure,

wherein said second nested structure comprises an arrangement of a flexible bellows and a rubberized support.

2. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said turbo pump is coupled to a rigid mounting structure at said pump inlet port via said vibration damping assembly.

3. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 2, wherein said vibration damping assembly is coupled between said rigid mounting structure and at least a first coupling portion at said first axial end of said pump body and a second coupling portion on the pump body disposed between said first axial end and said second axial end of said pump body.

4. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 3, wherein said second coupling portion comprises a radially extended structure integrally formed on said pump body.

5. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 4, wherein said coupling portion comprises a ring extended around said body.

6. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 4, wherein said coupling portion comprises a plurality of flanges disposed around said body.

7. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said first nested structure is a flexible damping structure having a first distal end and a second distal end and is coupled between said rigid mounting structure at the first distal end and said pump at the second distal end.

8. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 7, wherein said first nested structure comprises a flexible bellows.

9. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 7, wherein said second nested structure being a flexible structure having a first distal end and a second distal end and being coupled at the first distal end of said flexible structure to said pump at said first axial end and to the second end of said first nested structure at the second distal end of said flexible structure.

10. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 9, wherein at least one of said first nested structure and said second nested structure comprises at least one flexible bellows.

11. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 10, wherein both said first nested structure and said second nested structure are flexible and are adapted to reduce both compression and extraction forces.

12. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein at least one of said first nested structure and said second nested structure comprises a flexible bellows.

13. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said flexible bellows is connected for extraction by atmospheric pressure.

14. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said exit port is disposed proximate said second axial end of said body, and is not covered by said vibration damping assembly.

15. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said body external surface further comprises an axial portion and an end portion, said end portion being substantially radially extended from said center axis to said axial portion and being adapted for receiving facilities connections.

16. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1, wherein said significant portion comprises between 50% and 70% of said external side surface.

17. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 15, wherein said pump facilities connected through said bottom comprise one or more of a rough pumping port, cooling water inlet and outlet, bearings gas purge and electrical connections.

18. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim 1 where the vibration damping assembly defined by the first nested structure and the second nested structure is substantially cone shaped.

19. A gas turbo pump assembly for connection to an inlet port, comprising:

a turbo pump having a pump body with an external surface and a center axis, a pump inlet port, said pump inlet port being disposed at a first axial end of said pump body and being coupled to a vacuum chamber port, and an exit port disposed proximate a second axial end of said body; and

a vibration damping assembly, disposed to enclose a significant portion of said pump body in a nested arrangement, said vibration damping assembly comprising a first nested structure having an outer peripheral surface and an inner peripheral surface, said inner peripheral surface being disposed around and adjacent to the external surface of said significant portion of said pump body, and a second nested structure having an inner peripheral surface, said inner peripheral surface being disposed around and adjacent to the outer peripheral surface of said first nested structure,

wherein said first nested structure is a flexible damping structure having a first distal end and a second distal end and is coupled between said rigid mounting structure at the first distal end and said pump at the second distal end, and

wherein said second nested structure is a rigid structure having a first distal end and a second distal end and is coupled to said pump body at the first distal end of said rigid structure and the second distal end of said first connecting structure at the second distal end of said rigid structure.

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20. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim **19** where the vibration damping assembly defined by the first connection structure and the second connection structure is substantially cone shaped.

21. A vibration damping assembly for substantially enclosing a gas turbo pump in a nested fashion, and securing the pump to an inlet port, comprising:

a vibration damping structure defining an enclosure having at axially opposed ends a first and second opening, respectively, said first opening being adapted for coupling to an inlet port and said second opening being adapted to receive therein a substantial portion of the pump, said vibration damping structure comprising a

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first nested structure and a second nested structure, said first nested structure being a rigid support structure having first and second ends and being adapted to being coupled between a rigid mounting structure at the first end and said second nested structure at the second end, said second nested structure being flexible and being coupled between said pump body at said first axial end and said first nested structure.

22. The turbo pump assembly as recited in claim **21**, wherein said vibration damper comprises a flexible bellows.

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